

Dennis Gonsalves to Leave Cornell

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By John Zakour & Linda McCandless

GENEVA, NY: Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor Dennis Gonsalves has been named the director of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center in Hilo, Hawaii. In addition to directing the center, the prominent plant pathologist will maintain an active research program on plant viruses.

Gonsalves' research at Cornell has focused on plant virology with the goal of controlling virus disease of fruits and vegetables. His most notable accomplishment has been the development and commercialization of transgenic papaya that is resistant to the papaya ringspot virus. Two virus resistant varieties, 'Rainbow' and 'Sunup', were released to growers in Hawaii in 1998. The work helped save the papaya industry in Hawaii and elsewhere, and has drawn the attention of the world media.

Recently, Gonsalves has been conducting research on the potential risks of transgenic plants under realistic field conditions. He conducts international work on a range of viruses and their impact on grower communities. His work has attracted numerous scientists and graduate students to his laboratory.

Many other successes highlight Gonsalves' career while at Cornell, most notably the development of multiple virus resistant transgenic plants, particularly in squash, using tomato spotted wilt virus as a model. He serologically characterized and sequenced the genomes of grapevine leafroll and stem pitting viruses, and developed rapid diagnostic methods to detect these viruses. He has also worked on the identification of resistant grape cultivars and rootstocks. His lab serves as a quarantine and testing facility for imported grapevines, and as the center for ELISA testing for the plum pox virus in New York.

Gonsalves will leave Cornell's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva,



Dennis Gonsalves

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NY, where he has worked for nearly 25 years, with more than 180 publications and 13 patents to his credit, having helped educate 18 graduate students and numerous postdocs from around the world in his laboratory at Geneva. He will be joined in Hilo by his wife, Carol, who has volunteered in his lab for over a decade.

Gonsalves, a native of Hawaii, grew up on a sugar cane plantation and attended the University of Hawaii, where he received his BS and MS degrees. He subsequently obtained his PhD at the University of California at Davis. From 1972-77, he was an assistant professor at the University of Florida, and named an associate professor there just before coming to Cornell as an associate professor in 1977. He was named a full professor in 1986, and a Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor in 1995. He is a member of the Society for General Microbiology, and the American Phytopathological Society, where he was named a fellow in 1991.

Gonsalves is looking forward to the challenges of his new position. Historically, ARS has had several research units scattered throughout Hawaii. The center was started a little over three years ago, with plans to build a new center in Hilo to house all of the units. Ground breaking and construction of the different phases of the center is expected to start later this year. Currently, there are 18 scientists at the center, with projections to increase to 38. "How we perform and justify our activities will affect our chances of reaching the upper limit of scientists," says Gonsalves.

"I appreciate the chance to come from a sugar plantation in Kohala to such an excellent university as Cornell," says Gonsalves. "Now, I will return to Hawaii to work only 80 miles from where I was born, with the wealth of knowledge and experience that I gained at Cornell to help me. It's been a great 25 years at Cornell, but it is time for Carol and me to see what we can do in Hawaii."

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More on Gonsalves'groundbreaking work with papaya may be found at:

<http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/pubs/press/1998/papavarelease.html>

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